



Blue Ridge Parkway News



Dear Neighbors and Visitors,

Now that the new year has arrived, I would like to take a moment to update you. This is our 4th planning newsletter, and I am happy to report that we are making steady progress in developing our general management plan. Such a major undertaking!

In our April newsletter (volume 3) we told you about what we had heard from our many publics — the things they value about the parkway and what their concerns and issues are. Since then the planning team has been very busy. As you and I know, the Blue Ridge Parkway isn't your typical park. It's very long and very skinny in most places, and then it has all of those 'beads along the string' — like Peaks of Otter, Doughton Park, and Mt. Pisgah, to name a few. Many of these are large park areas in themselves. And then there are those beautiful mountains and valleys that help make the views from the parkway so special, but which are largely in the safekeeping of our neighbors.

The planning team has been taking all the information they've been gathering and developing some initial approaches to the park's future management.

Although this is a lengthy process, it is still exciting because now we are beginning to explore what could be. So I invite you to take a little time to read further and let us know what you think.

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<http://planning.nps.gov/plans.cfm> Click on **Blue Ridge Parkway** in the list of Active Planning Websites. Then click on **What's New** to find the list of publications.

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Making Progress...

Although efforts to develop a plan for the next 20 years of the Blue Ridge Parkway's future are moving forward steadily, the project's timeframes have shifted slightly. The size and complexity of the park — 469 linear miles, 181 public access points, and 24 developed sites — required more time for adequate analysis and discussion than originally estimated. So the timeframes identified below have been adjusted from the earlier estimates.

WE ARE HERE	Step and Timeframe	Planning Activity	Participation Opportunities
	1 FALL 2001	Initiate Project The planning team assembles, begins to identify the project's scope, customizes the planning process, and begins to establish contacts with participants.	
	2 WINTER 2001-SUMMER 2002	Define Planning Context and Foundation The team examines <i>WHY</i> the park was established and affirms the park's mission, purpose, and significance. Team members collect and analyze relevant data and public comments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Read newsletters and send us comments + Help us build a mailing list
	3 FALL 2002-SUMMER 2004	Develop and Evaluate Alternatives Using staff and public input, the team explores <i>WHAT</i> the park's future should look like and proposes a range of reasonable alternatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Read newsletters and send us your ideas and comments + Come to public meetings
	4 FALL 2004-SUMMER 2005	Prepare a Draft Document A draft general management plan and environmental impact statement is published. The draft document describes the alternatives and the impacts of implementing each. Based on the impacts and public input, a preferred alternative is identified in the document.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Read the draft plan and send us your ideas and comments
	5 FALL 2005-SPRING 2006	Publish Final Document Based on review by the National Park Service and the public, the team revises the General Management Plan/ Environmental Impact Statement and distributes a final plan. The plan is approved in a published Record of Decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Read the final plan, including NPS responses to substantive public comments and official letters.
	6 SPRING 2006 AND BEYOND	Implement the Approved Plan After the Record of Decision is issued, and as funding allows, the general management plan is implemented.	

Understanding General Management Planning

In previous newsletters we have talked about general management plans (GMPs), why they are important, and what they accomplish. We have discussed the legal requirement for all National Park Service units to have these long-range plans, and we have explained the broad level of decision making that is contained in these plans. We are now far enough along in the Blue Ridge plan that it is helpful to discuss some of the elements of the planning process in more detail.

You may remember that developing a vision for the park's future (and identifying the management direction that will help create that future) is the primary role of the general management plan. But before we settle on a particular vision, we develop and analyze several possible directions for the future. These different directions are called *alternatives*. Evaluating alternatives enables us to compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of one course of action over another. Such comparison is a requirement of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and is at the core of the National Park Service's GMP process.

Management Prescriptions

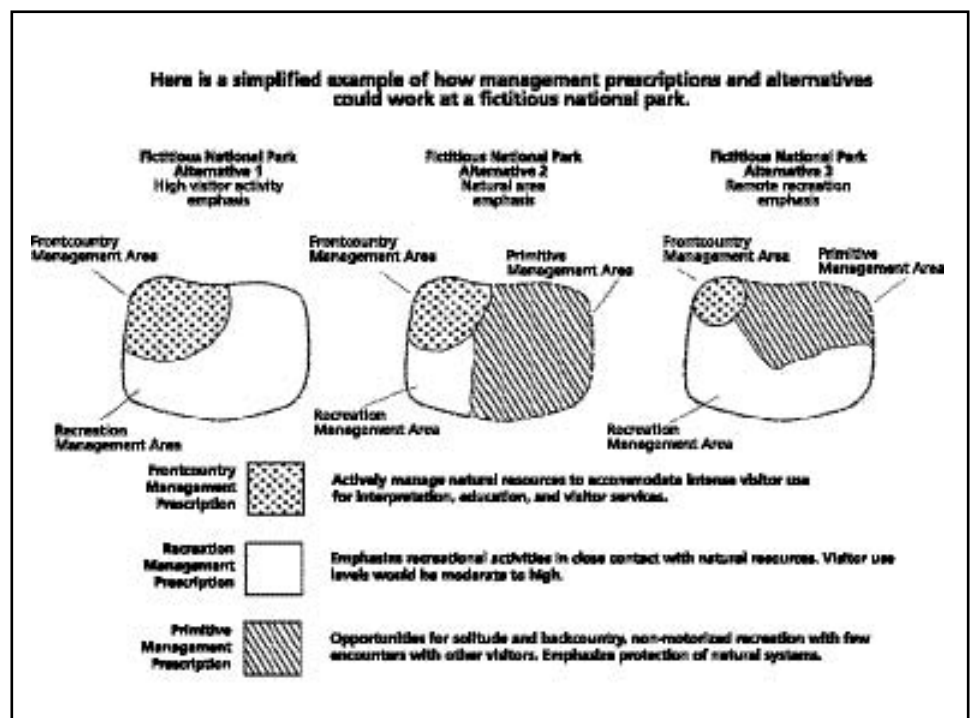
An important tool used by planners in the GMP process is the development of *management prescriptions*. Management prescriptions describe how to achieve a variety of resource and visitor experience conditions and serve recreational needs in different geographical areas. Desired conditions for park cultural and natural resources and for visitor experiences are different in each management prescription. The prescriptions are intended to represent the widest possible range of conditions that would be appropriate within a park's purpose and significance (see previous newsletters or the park website for statements defining the purpose and significance of the Blue Ridge Parkway). Ideas for the range of prescriptions came from public comments and from park staff. The GMP team has described eight possible management prescriptions that could be appropriate to various areas at the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Exploration of Alternatives

In National Park Service planning, alternative future directions for a park are developed by allocating management prescriptions to various geographic locations in different

combinations. Allocation of management prescriptions is guided by an overall concept. For example, at Blue Ridge Parkway, three possible directions for the park could include: *concept 1—managing the park in recognition of the historic intent of the parkway designers*, in which management would honor the 1936 Master Plan for the parkway, and visitors would experience the park as nearly as possible in the ways envisioned historically; *concept 2—managing the park as a corridor that links regional natural and cultural heritage*, in which management would emphasize connections to regional heritage and allow modifications to the parkway to encourage interconnections with nearby communities and services; and *concept 3—managing the park in recognition of natural ecological values*, in which management would emphasize protection of a natural corridor extending the length of the parkway. You can imagine that these different directions would require that certain areas of the park be managed differently. These differences would be reflected in the maps that would show how the management prescriptions would be allocated as management areas in each alternative.

To facilitate comparison of alternatives, each one is developed as true as possible to its guiding concept. Because of this, none will probably represent ideal conditions for the park. The “best” alternative will eventually be developed following extensive analysis of the advantages of each. It is likely that the best alternative will incorporate elements from each of the original alternatives.



The management prescriptions for the Blue Ridge Parkway, so far developed in draft, are presented in this newsletter. The planning team is currently working on developing sets of management areas for alternatives, but as we do this we need your input on the prescriptions to make sure we are headed in the right direction. *Do the management prescriptions encompass a full range of potential resource and social conditions for the park? Are there experiences that are important to you that are not reflected in one or more of the management prescriptions?*

Please review the draft management prescriptions and send us your ideas on the attached response form or by e-mail. The e-mail and website addresses are on the front page of this newsletter.

Draft Management Prescriptions

Special Natural Resource Management Prescription

Natural and Cultural Resources Conditions

The management emphasis in areas under this prescription would be the protection of special natural resources, which could include habitat for threatened and endangered species, particularly fragile natural communities, and places with other outstanding natural values. Resources in these locations would be retained in or restored to near natural conditions and managed to maintain significant ecological values.

Cultural resources in these management areas would be preserved if they were of national significance, and preservation methods used would not negatively impact natural resource conditions. Other cultural resources would be individually evaluated under National Register of Historic Places criteria for potential preservation.

Visitor Experience Conditions

Visitors to these areas would have opportunities to experience the natural environment with minimal evidence of human intrusion. Use levels would be very low, such as might be expected in a backcountry or wilderness area, and visitation would be highly regulated to protect resource integrity. Some especially fragile areas could be closed to visitor use.

Activities such as research and monitoring, walking or hiking, photography, and generally enjoying natural values would be expected to occur in these areas. Developments, however, would be minimal and would generally consist only of trails and necessary support facilities such as trail-head parking and primitive restrooms. Interpretive media would generally not occur onsite, but guided interpretive programs could be offered in areas where resources could sustain use by small groups



A Last Chance Landscape

In March 2003 the Roanoke section of the Blue Ridge Parkway was named a "Last Chance Landscape" by Scenic America, a national nonprofit organization. This 28-mile section of the parkway was one of 10 threatened landscapes recently listed by the organization.

The organization's president, Meg Maguire, said that each Last Chance Landscape is a place of beauty or distinctive community character that was chosen because it "faces imminent and potentially irrevocable harm." Through designation, Scenic America hopes to encourage people at the local, state, and national levels to step forward and preserve their scenic beauty before it's too late.

At a press conference in Roanoke, local leaders pledged to do just that. Rep. Bob Goodlatte described the parkway as a national treasure and that "Preserving the parkway viewshed in the Roanoke Valley is important not only as a scenic resource but also for the enormous economic impact that the parkway visitors have on the area." Joe McNamara, County Board of Supervisors, and Elmer Hodge, County Administrator, said they would be working closely with park officials in the coming months to develop specific strategies for protecting and enhancing views. And Roger Holnback, executive director of the Western Virginia Land Trust, says his organization will help advise and support efforts to develop and implement a long-term view protection strategy.

By 2020 Roanoke County's population is expected to grow by 16%, and in the adjacent counties of Botetourt, Franklin, and Bedford, estimates are even higher, ranging from 31% to 45% respectively ("A Socioeconomic Atlas for Blue Ridge Parkway and Its Region," NPS 2003). This highlights the importance, as noted by several speakers at the press conference, of working cooperatively with adjacent landowners and providing incentives to encourage sensitive planning and selective acquisition of conservation easements and critical tracts.



Socioeconomic Atlas for 29-County Area

Change in human activities and socioeconomic conditions outside a park's boundaries can create complex park management challenges. Information about regional trends and conditions is needed to manage and conserve park resources — both natural and cultural — more effectively. The NPS Social Science Program recently completed an atlas of regional socioeconomic trends to provide park managers, planners, community leaders, and others with a better understanding of changing human activities and socioeconomic conditions in the 29-county region surrounding the Blue Ridge Parkway. The atlas can also help neighboring communities and the park address regional issues, such as changes in historical land uses and viewsheds, that impact both the quality of life for regional residents and park visitors' experiences. Based primarily on information in the 2000 census, the atlas provides this information in a series of maps, tables, and explanatory text.

Each map is designed for easy comparison, so readers can see how conditions and trends in their own counties compare with those in other counties and relate to larger regional patterns. The six general data categories are population, economy and commerce, land use, social and cultural characteristics, recreation, and administration and government. A special summary of atlas data related to land use, including population, recreation, and industry and employment, has been prepared for each county. There will be a very limited supply of atlases in printed and compact disc formats available from the park (contact Laura Rotegard, Management Assistant). The electronic version, including county summaries (by state), can be accessed via the Internet at www.nps.gov/blri/pphtml/facts.html.

Natural Character Management Prescription

Natural and Cultural Resources Conditions

Natural resources in areas under this prescription would be monitored and maintained in a healthy condition, but minimal modifications could be permitted to accommodate management needs or visitor use if the modifications support or harmonize with the natural environment. Visitor activities considered appropriate would be those that would not degrade natural values.

Cultural resources would be evaluated for appropriate management — nationally significant resources could be stabilized or preserved, and all others would be evaluated for potential preservation.

Visitor Experience Conditions

Visitors to these areas would encounter intact natural resources, features, and systems. Opportunities for solitude, contemplation, natural-resource-oriented recreation, and education would be key elements of the experience. Although use levels would be low and generally dispersed, more visitors would be expected to use these areas than the special natural resource management areas. Low impact activities such as hiking, exploring natural and cultural resources, backcountry camping, self-guided interpretation, and small group guided activities would be anticipated in these areas. Appropriate facilities could include trails, backcountry campsites, trailhead parking and orientation facilities, and nonintrusive interpretive media such as signs or simple wayside exhibits.

Interactive Recreation Management Prescription

Natural and Cultural Resources Conditions

The appearance of natural or pastoral/rural settings would be important in areas under this management prescription. Although resources could be modified as necessary to accommodate visitor activities, degradation of resource values would be avoided.

Nationally significant cultural resources would be preserved or rehabilitated. Others would be evaluated for potential preservation.

Visitor Experience Conditions

Recreation in close contact with natural and cultural resources would be the key experience in this management prescription. Visitor use levels would be expected to be moderate to high, group activities could be common, and sights and sounds of other people would be anticipated. Hiking, walking, guided interpretive programs, nature observation, fishing, and picnicking would be examples of typical activities in these areas. Facilities that support recreational activities and interpretation would be appropriate in this prescription, and could include trails and trailheads, interpretive media, picnic

tables and shelters, and staging areas for shuttles or other transportation services.

Front Country / Visitor Services Management Prescription

Natural and Cultural Resources Conditions

In areas under this management prescription natural resources would be actively managed to accommodate intense visitor use for interpretation, education, and visitor services. Although developments would result in localized impacts on natural resources, the settings in which the developments occur would appear natural and modifications would be tolerated only if they were compatible with the natural environments.

Similarly, cultural areas in which developments occur would retain their historic or ethnographic character, but some resources could be appropriately modified for visitor activities. Cultural and historic areas would be managed to accommodate visitor use.

Visitor Experience Conditions

Visitors would experience and learn about the natural and cultural heritage of the central and southern Appalachians in built environments and highly structured, often social, settings. Comforts and basic needs would be met, and overnight experiences could be accommodated. Use levels could be high and very interactive with other visitors and NPS staff. Interpretation, orientation, dining, picnicking, and shopping could be appropriate activities. Developments could include interpretive trails and walkways, lodging, campgrounds, vehicle service stations, museums and visitor centers, and other destination-oriented support facilities. Any new or expanded facilities would be compatible with parkway design and historic character.

Historic Parkway Design Management Prescription

Natural and Cultural Resources Conditions

The park's natural resources would be managed to reflect the character and design elements of the parkway. As nearly as possible, natural resources would appear as envisioned by early parkway planners.

Cultural resource management would emphasize preservation of the parkway's historic location, design, materials, and workmanship. Elements that, in combination, created the parkway's form, plan, and structure would be preserved or rehabilitated wherever feasible. Other cultural resources would be evaluated for potential preservation.

Visitor Experience Conditions

Visitors would experience the leisurely setting of the parkway as originally envisioned, with its various

Appalachian natural, cultural, and scenic attributes without commercial advertising, congestion, and driving conflicts. Activities consistent with early plans for the parkway, including regulated, low-speed travel, stopping at overlooks and parking areas, picnicking, hiking, and interpretive activities, would be appropriate. Facilities and constructed features such as pullouts, bridges, tunnels, contact centers, lodging, and other development included in the original parkway concept would be important to the experience. Developments not included in the parkway's early planning could be removed or modified to serve visitor or management needs.

Adaptive Parkway Design Management Prescription

Natural and Cultural Resources Conditions

In this prescription, greater flexibility in management of the parkway corridor would allow for a wider array of natural resource management options than in the Historic Parkway Design Management prescription. So long as the overall character of these areas reflects the early parkway concept, the appearance of natural areas could be modified to enhance the health and continuity of natural systems.

Although cultural resources management would emphasize protection of the original design concept of the parkway, modifications to design elements would be acceptable for the purposes of visitor safety, additional visitor amenities, management efficiency, and/or resource protection. Any modifications would harmonize with the historic character of the parkway.

Visitor Experience Conditions

The visitor experience would be similar to that under the Historic Parkway Design Management prescription, but there would be subtle changes in parkway design elements. The leisurely and scenic character of parkway travel would remain true to the original concept, but some elements of the original design could be different from early plans. Appropriate activities and developments would be the same as in the Historic Parkway Design Management prescription.

Cultural / Agricultural Character Management Prescription

Natural and Cultural Resources Conditions

Natural resources under this prescription would be managed to enhance the cultural and agricultural character of significant historic sites and landscapes.

Cultural resources management would emphasize the preservation of cultural landscape values, focusing on the setting, feeling, and physical features that convey the historic or cultural character of sites significant to the Central and Southern Appalachian Highlands.

Visitor Experience Conditions

In these areas, the primary visitor experience would be seeing and visiting historic structures and landscapes indicative of the region's cultural heritage. Use levels could be expected to be moderate to high, and appropriate activities could include sightseeing, photography, walking, and interpretive programs so long as they were not disruptive to the setting. Trails and walkways, roads (in historic context), and interpretive media might be appropriate developments, but would be in harmony with the historic and/or cultural character of the site.

Park Support Management Prescription

Natural and Cultural Resources Conditions

In these areas, natural resources could be moderately to highly modified to accommodate NPS operations and staff needs.

Significant cultural resources would be preserved, but some could be modified for NPS operational purposes if such modifications were consistent with resource integrity. Resources of less than national significance would be evaluated for potential preservation.

Visitor Experience Conditions

Generally these areas would not accommodate visitor use, but some access for information or administrative functions could be appropriate. Visitor activities would only be accommodated if they do not interfere with park operations and administration.



Coming in 2004

The planning team is working on completing the preliminary alternatives. Your comments on the draft management prescriptions will help shape this work. We hope to have draft alternatives ready to share with you this coming spring. As you can imagine, the team is finding that formulating alternatives for 469 miles of parkway and 24 developed areas is really exciting, but also very challenging!

We will be preparing a planning alternatives "newsbook" (newsletter/workbook) that will present the alternatives on a set of maps and ask for your review and input. This newsbook is going to be much longer and more detailed than anything we have distributed to the Blue Ridge public to date. To save paper, we will offer the newsbook on a CD (compact disc) and an electronic version that will be available for downloading from the Internet at www.planning.nps.gov. If you cannot or do not want to use either of these, a printed version will be available. **Please indicate your preference on the enclosed comment form.**

Meetings will also be held in several locations along the parkway to give us an opportunity to discuss the alternatives directly with the public. An announcement about the meetings will be mailed out in advance.

Using ideas and suggestions from the public and other agencies, the planning team will refine the alternatives and begin analysis of the likely consequences (both negative and positive) of implementing the various alternatives. Based on this analysis, the National Park Service will select or develop a "preferred alternative" — that is, the alternative that appears to offer the most advantages to the parkway and its users and neighbors. We expect to be thinking about a preferred alternative next fall.

We greatly appreciate your continued interest in the future of the Blue Ridge Parkway and your thoughts and ideas for the plan. We'll keep you posted on our progress.



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